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Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?

by Mark Fisher

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40 Highlights

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the world doesn't end with a bang, it winks out, unravels, gradually falls apart.

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Action is pointless; only senseless hope makes sense.

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it could well be the case that the future harbors only reiteration and re-permutation.

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The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or Das Kapital, a monetary value.

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In the conversion of practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects, the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironized, transformed into artifacts.

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even success meant failure, since to succeed would only mean that you were the new meat on which the system could feed.

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They pose as unflinching observers who refuse to prettify the world so that it can be fitted into the supposedly simple ethical binaries of the superhero comic and the traditional crime novel.

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anti-capitalism is widely disseminated in capitalism.

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Time after time, the villain in Hollywood films will turn out to be the 'evil corporation'. Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it.

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which subjugation no longer takes the form of a subordination to an extrinsic spectacle, but rather invites us to interact and participate.

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the film performs our anti-capitalism for us, allowing us to continue to consume with impunity.

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even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them.

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So long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange.

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We believe that money is only a meaningless token of no intrinsic worth, yet we act as if it has a holy value.

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The fantasy being that western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequalities, could itself solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products.

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Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business.

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Climate change and the threat of resource-depletion are not being repressed so much as incorporated into advertising and marketing.

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that the burning up of Earth's resources is only a temporary glitch, and that, after a suitable period of recovery, capital can terraform the planet and recolonize it).

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not of apathy, nor of cynicism, but of reflexive impotence. They know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can't do anything about it. But that 'knowledge', that reflexivity, is not a passive observation of an already existing state of affairs. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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By privatizing these problems – treating them as if they were caused only by chemical imbalances in the individual's neurology and/or by their family background – any question of social systemic causation is ruled out.

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indefinite postponement: Education as a lifelong process... Training that persists for as long as your working life continues... Work you take home with you... Working from home, homing from work.

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Control only works if you are complicit with it.

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The carceral regime of discipline is being eroded by the technologies of control, with their systems of perpetual consumption and continuous development.

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Some students want Nietzsche in the same way that they want a hamburger; they fail to grasp – and the logic of the consumer system encourages this misapprehension – that the indigestibility, the difficulty is Nietzsche.

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a reassurance that the matrix was still there, within reach.

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The consequence of being hooked into the entertainment matrix is twitchy, agitated interpassivity, an inability to concentrate or focus.

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the figure of control is the debtor-addict.

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what is called dyslexia may in many cases amount to a post-lexia. Teenagers process capital's image-dense data very effectively without any need to read

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Being smart means being dynamic and nomadic, and against centralized bureaucracy; believing in dialogue and cooperation as against central authority; in flexibility as against routine; culture and knowledge as against industrial production; in spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis as against fixed hierarchy.

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Taken together, the immobilizers, with their implicit concession that capitalism can only be resisted, never overcome, and the liberal communists, who maintain that the amoral excesses of capitalism must be offset by charity, give a sense of the way in which capitalist realism circumscribes current political possibilities.

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'Flexibility', 'nomadism' and 'spontaneity' are the very hallmarks of management in a post-Fordist, Control society.

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There is no longer an identifiable external enemy.

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if you do not succeed, there is only one person to blame.

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Considering mental illness an individual chemico-biological problem has enormous benefits for capitalism. First, it reinforces Capital's drive towards atomistic individualization (you are sick because of your brain chemistry). Second, it provides an enormously lucrative market in which multinational pharmaceutical companies can peddle their pharmaceuticals (we can cure you with our SSRIs).

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the flattening of pyramidal hierarchies has actually led to more surveillance of workers.

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valuing of symbols of achievement over actual achievement.

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We ourselves occupy the empty seat of power, phoning and clicking in our responses.

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workers become their own auditors, forced to assess their own performance.

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This strategy – of accepting the incommensurable and the senseless without question – has always been the exemplary technique of sanity as such,

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governments have discovered that when they give powers to private companies, and those private companies screw up, voters blame the government for giving the powers away, rather than the companies for misusing them'.
